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ABSTRACT

After examining several definitions of learning styles, this guide helps reading teachers identify the areas in which they need to adapt their practices in adjusting to differences in their students' learning styles. A 34-item Teacher Inventory of Adaptations for Learning Styles in Reading Classes checklist is provided in the guide. (MS)

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How Well Do I Adjust to Differences in Learning Styles When I Teach Reading?

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How Well Do I Adjust to Differences in Learning Styles When I Teach Reading?

Assessing and adjusting to learning styles is a controversial topic that has been described by many as a basis for successful instructional planning that is fundamental to helping students succeed in becoming skilled readers with the least duress. However, many reading teachers find that most instructional programs pay little or no attention to illustrating how to make adjustments for learning styles when teaching reading.

There are some more popular definitions of learning styles, ranging from simple to complex. David Hunt (1979) suggests a very simple definition of the term: the educational conditions under which a student learns best, particularly in terms of structure needed. Marie Carbo and Rita and Kenneth Dunn (1986) are names synonymous with recent work in the area of learning styles. They have defined the term as the way students "are affected by their (a) immediate environment, (b) own emotionality, (c) sociological needs, (d) physical characteristics, and (e) psychological inclinations when concentrating and trying to master and remember new or difficult information or skills" (p. 2) in reading and other academic areas.

If we accept this more complex definition, then stimuli associated with reading classes can be divided into the five categories of environment, emotionality, sociological needs, physical needs, and psychological inclinations. Each category can be subdivided into very specific factors. Environmental stimuli include sound, light, temperature, and room design, while motivation, persistence, responsibility, and structure are emotional variables. The student's desire to work with peers, alone, in pairs, on teams, with an authority figure or in a group involve sociological factors. Physical stimuli include sensory input, food intake, time of day, and mobility while psychological inclinations involve the need for inductive or deductive teaching, attention to brain hemispheric preferences, and effective management of impulsivity and reflectivity (Carbo, Dunn & Dunn, 1986). Many of these factors interact in some instructional adjustments that can be made in the reading classroom.

Since the concept of learning styles is complicated and sometimes difficult to assess and adjust to for individual students, then, as reading teachers it may be more practical to analyse our own consciousness of different ways that students learn. Many of us may already make many adjustments without even thinking about them. The following checklist, based on the definition by Carbo, Dunn, & Dunn, may help us identify those areas where we are adjusting and those others that we may need to change. This checklist is designed so that users mark in

the columns "most of the time," "usually," or "seldom" to indicate their usual performance of the items. Note the row of asterisks in the middle and the heavy black line to the right. Answers close to the heavy line suggest strengths, while those near the asterisks suggest weaknesses that might be modified by becoming more aware of the many aspects of learning styles that impact reading instruction

Teacher Inventory of Adaptations for Learning Styles In Reading Classes

Directions: Evaluate yourself for your practices during reading instruction. Place a check in the appropriate column for each item.

When I teach reading,	Most of the time	Usually	Seldom
Environmental factors			
1. All of my students are exposed to the same amount of sound and noise.			
2. All of my students are exposed to the same amount of light.			
3. All of my students are exposed to the same temperature.			
4. All of my students are exposed to the same room arrangement and furniture.			
5. All of my students must read to learn.			
6. All of my students get the same length assignments.			

Emotional factors

7. All of my students must be able to learn by lecture and discussion.
8. All of my students must be able to follow many directions over several hours.
9. I expect youngsters in my class to have the same attention span.
10. I give the same assignments to all youngsters.
11. I give the same amount of supervision to everyone in my class.

Sociological factors

12. I expect all my students to learn from me.
13. All of my students are expected to work without peer interaction.
14. Students in my classes always work in approximately equal size groups or as a whole group.
15. I form groups purely on the basis of ability.
16. I concentrate on monitoring and discussing my students' errors.

17. My instruction always requires auditory learning for all students.
18. My instruction always requires visual learning for all students.

Physical factors

19. My instruction always requires tactile learning for all students.
20. My instruction always requires kinesthetic learning for all students.
21. I avoid using multisensory instruction in my teaching.
22. All my students are expected to eat on the same schedule irregardless of the effects on their learning.
23. All of my students are expected to drink on the same schedule irregardless of the effects on their learning.
24. I expect all students to do their best work at my class time.
25. All of my students are expected to assume one physical position for my entire class.
26. I make assignments that require students to stay in the same location throughout class.

Instructional adjustments

27. I use uniform assignments with little student choice.
28. I present most lessons by giving the facts, then an overall conclusion.
29. I present most lessons through an overview followed by details.
30. I avoid the sight method with my children.

31. I always teach phonics as an analytic method of identifying words.
32. I avoid varied hands-on equipment, such as computers, games, and typewriters with my students.
33. I have children demonstrate their reading comprehension by role-playing, drama, pantomime, art, puppets, and demonstrations.
34. I use writing to teach reading.

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